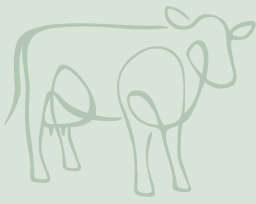


Best practice farms achieve healthy, natural calving of their cows by selecting bulls for calving ease, careful management of pregnant animals, close monitoring at calving time to allow timely and effective interventions when needed and interactions with their calves (licking, suckling).



Why is this important?



Bull selection and optimal management of the pregnancy and calving periods are essential to prevent obstetric issues that can severely impair the health and welfare of both cows and calves. Efficient, well designed calving facilities will make surveillance of the cows easier, interventions safer and more efficient, as well as limiting the risk of infection and disease transmission. New born calves have naive immune systems and are vulnerable to the bacteria present in wet, and dirty bedding. Limiting this risk by ensuring walls, floors and partitions can be easily cleaned and disinfected and providing ample comfortable, dry bedding, will enhance the welfare of both cows and their calves.



Good practice

- ✓ Clean water must be freely available at all times.

See the  **Cow Nutrition factsheet** for more information



Best practice

See the  **Cow Nutrition factsheet** for more information





Good practice

- ✓ No cow should be tethered during calving. They must be loose penned or able to move freely on pasture.
- ✓ Cows should have access to a separate calving area which provides a clean, non-stressful environment. When indoors, cows should be moved to a calving pen well before the onset of calving to minimise stress. Where the intention is to “pen off” rather than moving the cow, this should be done when the first signs of calving occur (signs of restlessness, agitation; swelling of the vulva and udder; relaxation of sacro-sciatic ligaments in the pelvis). The calving area must be at least 11 m² (minimum width, 3 m), well-ventilated and have a clean, comfortable, non-slip dry floor and ample bedding.
- ✓ Bedding material used in an indoor calving pen must be at least 5 cm thick, e.g. 15 kg of straw/ per animal/ per day. Blood and placenta should be removed and disposed of quickly after calving. Dirty bedding must be replaced by clean bedding between calvings.
- ✓ Cows exposed to cold temperatures (chilly or windy conditions) are at higher risk of suffering from dystocia. Where the regional climate warrants it, appropriate shelter, additional bedding should be provided to help reduce this risk.
- ✓ The cows should be observed after calving to ensure there are no problematic behaviours, such as preventing the calf from suckling. The pen should be modified to resolve any issues identified.
- ✓ Facilities for handling and restraint should be incorporated into the calving area, to facilitate assistance and surgery (e.g. caesarean) if necessary. A source of hot water and an electrical socket should be available in close proximity.

See the  **Cow Environment factsheet** for more information



Best practice

- ★ **Best practice** farms that have indoor calving provide clean, dry, individual penned calving areas with a minimum space allowance of 20m²/ cow and deep bedding.
- ★ **Best practice** farms determine the number of calving pens available according to the number of cows expected to calve simultaneously.
- ★ **Best practice** farms may use automatic systems (e.g. pedometers, collars, and CCTV) to evaluate cow activity and assist with monitoring changes in activity associated with calving.

See the  **Cow Environment factsheet** for more information





Good practice

- ✓ Equipment normally used during calving should be stored close to the calving area (e.g. calving ropes, jack, lubricant, iodine etc.). An emergency first aid kit containing gloves, disinfectant, soap, lubricant, cleaning materials such as swabs or cotton wool should be also be stored in a clean, dry place close to the calving pen.
- ✓ Do not intervene during calving if it is not strictly necessary and if it is, ensure hands are clean, disposable gloves are used, and the cow's vulva is cleaned first.
- ✓ Assess the need for analgesic (pain relieving) medications for each cow, based on the duration and difficulty of calving (with or without caesarean section) according to the protocol defined by your veterinarian.
- ✓ Monitor cows frequently when close to calving e.g. every 2 hrs. When labour has started this should increase in frequency. If the amniotic fluid is not expelled after 4 h and the contractions become regular, call your veterinarian. Once the amniotic fluid is expelled the cow should be monitored every 15-30 min. If the calf is not delivered within 2 hours assistance will be required.
- ✓ Soft calving ropes can be used to help bring the calf's legs into the correct position and assist in careful pulling to aid delivery. If a calving jack is to be used, the calf must be of a manageable size and in the correct position, otherwise there is increased risk of damaging both cow and calf. If the calf does not pass despite your help, call for veterinary assistance immediately.
- ✓ The placenta must be expelled within 12 h after a calf has been delivered. If this does not occur and the cow shows signs of fever or vulval discharge, veterinary assistance should be sought promptly.



Best practice

See the  **factsheets on Cow Metabolic and Nutritional disease, Cow Reproductive, Cow Infectious Disease, Cow Locomotion and Cow Udder Management** for more information



Good practice

- ✓ Ensure adequate space and bedding to allow cows to express normal peri- parturient (pre and post calving) behaviours.
- ✓ The behaviour of the cows in group calving pens should be monitored for signs of competitive or other problematic behaviour and action taken when identified. Keep visual contact between the calving cows and the other cows in the barn. Avoid moving a cow once she is introduced into a calving pen.
- ✓ After calving, allow cows to interact with their calf and exhibit normal maternal behaviours (examining, licking and nuzzling their calf). If problematic behaviours are noticed (e.g. preventing the calf access to feed) intervention should be implemented. The exception to this is where the risk of disease is such that cow and calf must be separated immediately.

See the  **Cow Behaviour and Human-Animal interactions factsheet** for more information



Best practice

- ★ **Best practice** farms move cows in pairs or stable groups to the general calving area, if it is permitted by the herd size. This ensures ongoing social support in the new environment and helps them adjust better even if they are in individual pens.
- ★ **Best practice** farms may utilise a combination of human observation, sensor equipment and remote access cameras, to monitor for signs of first stage labour, calving and post- partum behavioural changes. This approach minimises the risk of problems being missed, facilitates prompt intervention (when required) and improves human wellbeing as physical checks (e.g. through the night) can be managed more easily.

See the  **Cow Behaviour and Human-Animal interactions factsheet** for more information

Summary

When consideration is given to the nutritional, health and behavioural requirements of cows at calving time, the risk of complications can be reduced significantly and the quality of the calves produced improved.



Farm

Careful management and planning of nutritional, health and behavioural factors will improve the success of the calving season and reduce the losses associated with high complication rates.



Cows

A clean and comfortable calving area allows cows about to calve privacy from the herd and a safe and quiet place to bond with her calf. Recognition of the importance of the interactions between cow and new born calf will improve the health & welfare of both.



Handler

Staff on the farm will benefit from well organised calvings which use accurate records, nutritional and medical planning, which is documented and easy to follow, as well as appropriate training and veterinary support when required.

Take pride in all of your farm's good and best practices towards animal welfare!

Additional resources



Care4Dairy.eu